Technology in Schools:
Evaluation of Kentucky's Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP)

The Kentucky Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) exists to empower Kentucky's students to use technology for learning in Kentucky's classrooms. STLP has generally been successful in reaching its intended goals. In fact, STLP has had positive effects on teachers, students, schools and communities beyond those initially intended. Providing the opportunity to participate in STLP to all of Kentucky's students would spread these benefits across the state.

Preliminary interviews with students found that they are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about STLP. Many of these students are not the typical high achievers in their schools, so STLP provides an opportunity for a broader cross-section of children to practice leadership, experience success and build confidence, while increasing their technology-related skills. These students interact with teachers and other students at many different levels of technical proficiency, and are able to share their knowledge across usual boundaries of age, grade level, gender and culture.

In addition to reporting on the success of their students, STLP coordinators also report many benefits they gain, the greatest being their increased use of and comfort with technology. More than 25 percent of STLP coordinators who responded to an online survey stated that their participation in STLP increases the likelihood that they will "remain in the school system." This is an amazing effect considering the level of commitment STLP participation requires of them, and the fact that most of them receive no remuneration for this effort.

One of the main strengths of STLP is its implementation flexibility. This allows individual program coordinators to tailor the program to meet the needs and interests of their student, schools and communities. Some programs meet regularly as a class, and some as an extracurricular activity or club. Some groups produce intra-school media, some produce products, and some provide technical assistance.

The way in which students join STLP varies across programs. However, we find no difference in measured outcomes for programs that have stringent entrance requirements compared to those who accept all interested students. For this reason, we recommend that programs accept all students who express an interest in taking part.

Kentucky schools with STLP programs also realize direct benefits from the successes of their students and coordinators. One of these benefits is increased communication within the school community, via websites and school-based television broadcasts. STLP students often perform daily computer maintenance tasks throughout the school, both by staffing formal help desks and by more informal mechanisms. Some students even staff help desks that are accessible by their local communities. Coordinators report that this service is a key feature in keeping school computers and networks functioning.

Our recommendations include the following: First, since this program benefits so many different kinds of students it should be open to all students interested in participating. Second, STLP should be made available in all Kentucky schools.